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## Inside the antitrust mailbox

By: Alan Friedman, Bureau of Competition | Feb 11, 2014 12:49PM

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Every year, we receive thousands of emails, letters, and phone calls from businesses and consumers relating facts they believe present an antitrust concern. The Bureau welcomes inquiries from the public because a call or email can be the source of information that leads to an antitrust enforcement action to stop or prevent anticompetitive conduct. More generally, an important part of the FTC's mission is to promote public understanding of the competitive process. So, in addition to our law enforcement duties, it's our job to listen and to educate.

*Inside the Antitrust Mailbox* will be a recurring feature of our Competition Matters blog in which we'll answer frequently asked questions from the emails, calls, and letters that we receive. The answers will point to cases and other FTC materials that explain which facts can make out an antitrust violation, or alternatively, why the conduct is unlikely to harm consumers and may actually improve competition in the market.

These posts will add to our collection of educational resources, which is the best place to start if you're interested in contacting the Bureau with an antitrust question or complaint. [Competition Counts](#) presents a quick overview of the types of business conduct that we've investigated and that resulted in an FTC antitrust action. Looking for more detail? Our [Guide to the Antitrust Laws](#) discusses competition issues posed by a variety of business conduct, such as Dealings with Competitors, Dealings in the Supply Chain, Single Firm Conduct, and Mergers, with specific examples and additional FAQs. Reading these materials first may provide an answer to your question or help you spot conduct that could violate the antitrust laws.

Some folks ask for guidance about how to go about presenting their antitrust complaint, or wonder what happens after the complaint is submitted. Here are a few tips that will help us help you if you decide to call or write, plus some insight

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into what happens after you do.

## How To Frame Your Antitrust Complaint

While there is no official form or format, be sure your correspondence includes all of the information that you believe may suggest a competition problem. Facts matter in antitrust investigations, so provide a good summary of your complaint and, at a minimum, answer the following questions:

What company, entity or organization is engaging in conduct you believe violates the antitrust laws?

How do you believe this entity may have harmed competition?

What is your role in the situation? For instance, are you a customer, competitor or supplier?

To help us follow up as appropriate, please include a day-time telephone number.

## What Happens After Your Complaint Is Submitted?

Attorneys in the Office of Policy and Coordination review the mail every day to identify those complaints that merit referral to one of our investigators. Sometimes we refer correspondence to the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice or to a state Office of the Attorney General if appropriate. We forward any inquiries that raise consumer protection concerns to our colleagues in the Bureau of Consumer Protection. We may contact you to learn more about your complaint that would help with our initial evaluation. One thing is certain: one or more antitrust attorneys at the FTC will carefully review your complaint for possible further action.

Sometimes we hear back from folks who wonder if their complaint led to an investigation. With few exceptions, FTC investigations are not public, so we can't disclose whether an investigation is underway. Information about FTC law enforcement actions is placed on our website only after the agency reaches a settlement or files a lawsuit. But not every complaint will lead to an investigation, and only a few result in an FTC case. The FTC does not choose winners or losers – consumers do that. Nor do we act on behalf of individual consumers or businesses. Rather, our job is to make sure that businesses are competing fairly within a set of rules—the antitrust laws—and to prevent consumer harm in the form of higher prices, fewer choices, poorer service, or less innovation.

As always, [contact us](#) to report a suspected antitrust violation, and look for future blog posts from *Inside the Antitrust Mailbox*.

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